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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a relationship between the dynamics of sexual-fantasy response and the dynamics of literary response that could be exploited by encouraging students to learn by inventing, to fantasize, and to suspend their disbelief when reading all kinds of literature. Just as sexual fantasy focuses attention on the pleasures of sexual intercourse rather than on functional performance, so does literary appreciation depend, in part, on a suspension of disbelief and a focus on reading pleasure rather than on reading performance. The paper concludes that teachers can best help their students to read and understand literature by encouraging and elaborating student fantasies. (RL)

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Sensate Focus and the Suspension of Disbelief: Relationships Between Love, Sex and Literature

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When I was trying to organize these scattered thoughts about the relationships between love and sex and literature, I interrupted my work to read the new issue of Playboy when it arrived, and as is often the case in our coincidence-ridden world, I found the opening to this discussion in the first letter in the "Playboy Advisor" column. J. P. of Chicago, Illinois, writes: "I recently completed a speed-reading course. The techniques I learned have been a great help on homework and such, but I'm worried about pleasure readings. If a person speed-reads pornographic novels, will he develop a tendency toward premature ejaculation?"

As usual in letters to magazines and newspaper advice-mongers, one is not absolutely sure whether to take the correspondent seriously or whether to believe he is pulling our metaphoric leg. In the discussion that follows as I make some suggestions about the relationships between sex and reading, you may begin feeling the same ambivalence. The whole idea may strike you as nonsense. That's all right; because I will be trying to make a case for the value of non-sense. Worse, the nonsense that I present may strike you as useless, which is of course what makes us feel something is nonsense in the first place. So let that be also; for I will be trying to make a case for experiences of no use, that is, for experiences engaged in for some other reason than for the practical results they may produce.

What I would like to present, even though I have already referred to this discussion as my "work," is a "play" with some ideas, a play that results in perhaps a synthesis, perhaps an uneasy alliance, of two experiences that

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seem quite different from one another--a yoking together, often violently, of two different experiential realms. The result, as in J. P.'s letter to Playboy, is a pushing of a kind of psycho-logic to such extremes that it is apt to be the source of incredulous laughter. But that's all right, too. As Piaget tells us, "to learn is to invent." Let us invent together.

I should like to begin with some major fictional texts that gave rise to my playful efforts on this subject. The first is John Barth's retelling of the frametale of The Arabian Nights in Chimera. During the thousand and one nights, while Scherazade makes use of a thousand and one ways of making love and a thousand and one ways of telling stories, she and the genie Barth theorize about the relationship between these two "life-saving" phenomena. The genie tells Sherry that in his own time and place, there are scientists of the passions who maintain that language itself originated in infantile pregenital erotic exuberance, polymorphously perverse, by which "magic phrases" they seem to mean that "writing and reading, or telling and listening," are "literally ways of making love." Whether this is actually the case, neither the genie nor Sherry care; yet they like to speak "as if" it were (their favorite words, Sherry's sister observes). This theory "accounted thereby for the similarity between conventional dramatic structure--its exposition, rising action, climax and denouement--and the rhythm of sexual intercourse from foreplay through coitus to orgasm and release." Even more basically, they talk "as if" the relationship between teller and to[illegible] is basically erotic, in which the good reader is as involved as the author. "Narrative in short was a love-relation, not a rape; its success depended upon the reader's consent and cooperation...as well as the author's ability to arouse sustain, and satisfy."

The second text I wish to cite, one that seems to pick up Barth's metaphor and push it to the extreme, is William H. Gass's novella,

Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife. The metaphor carried out in the story is that the lonesome wife is the book itself, that very subjective-object which we hold in our hands and enter with excitement, pleasure, joy, and yes, even fear. As love/literature, she speaks to the reader as she seduces him with her body, the page: "how I love you now I have you here...I've got you deep inside of me like they say in the songs, fast as a ship in antarctic ice, and I won't need to pinion your arms, lover, butt you or knee, you'll stay, you'll want to, you'll beg me not to go and take my myth, my baffling maze, my sex, my veils, my art away...and I shall shave you so close and sand you so sensitive, so scarce and smooth, that when I put you at last up in public in the light of my lights, then anyone--anyone who's paid his buck in--will be easily able, just by looking, to lick the sweet heart out of your heart, the life from your living, and the daylights out of your cage." At the conclusion of the book, however, when the reader has left her, the lonesome wife complains that "he did not, in his address, at any time construct me. He made nothing, I swear--nothing. Empty I began, and empty I remained.... These words are all I am.... Oh, I'm the girl upon this couch, all right, you needn't fear; the one who's waltzed you through these pages, clothed and bare, who's hated you for your humiliations, sought your love.... Could you love me? Love me then...then love me... Yes, I know I can't command it. Yet I should love, if ever you would let me, like a laser, burning through all the foolish ceremonials of modesty and custom, cutting pieties of price and parentage, inheritance and privilege, away like stale sweet cake to sick a dog. My dears, my dears... how I would brood upon you: you, the world; and I, the language."

My final fictional text is from Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, that tissue of masturbatory fantasies that did much to integrate into respectable literature the pornographic fantasies that had always lain underground in our adolescence. Although the entire book is reflective of the work-play dichotomy

of literature and love I am concerned with here, the particular scene I am interested in now is when Portnoy tells the Monkey about a poem in which a swan fucks a beautiful girl. "Oh, goody," says Monkey. "But it's a serious poem," says Portnoy. "Well, it's a serious offense," replies Monkey.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

After the first reading, Monkey plays dumb, saying the only poetry she knows is, "I see London, I see France, I see Mary Jane's underpants"; except, she adds, "I didn't wear no underpants." But when she asks him to recite it again, Portnoy says: "When I finish, you know what she does? Takes hold of my hand, draws my fingers up between her legs. Where Mary Jane still wears no underpants." "Feel. It made my pussy wet," Monkey says. To which Portnoy exclaims, "Sweetheart: You understood the poem."

Well those are the texts. Many others could have been suggested which link love and sex and literature together, but these seem to raise the most crucial

issues and lay them bare most clearly. Before you object that Monkey's kind of knowledge is not the kind of knowledge literature teachers should try to implant in their students, let us proceed now with the conceptual part of this discussion, the "play" with the ideas. As Gass has the lonesome wife say, "how close, in the end, is a cunt to a concept--we enter both with joy."

I had perhaps best begin with the heterogeneous yoking of terms that informs the title of this presentation--sensate focus and the suspension of disbelief--and try to show in what way Masters and Johnson have been thrown into bed with Coleridge. We recall that in chapter 14 of the Biographia Literaria Coleridge explains the division of responsibilities between Wordsworth and himself in The Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge says that Wordsworth was to focus on the things of everyday life and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural "by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us," a world that had been covered over by a "film of familiarity and selfish solicitude." Coleridge says that his own task was to direct attention to persons and actions supernatural "so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith."

If one wishes to establish an analogy between this division of functions and sexuality, Wordsworth's task is equivalent to the revitalizing of a too familiar relationship by the powers of the imagination. It is to defamiliarize the familiar by means of fantasy to show that what we take for granted is more wonderful than our "selfish solicitude" allows us to realize--that within the imagination, what is usually relegated to the everyday or the natural is actually "super" natural if only we are not quite so solicitous about our self. Coleridge's task is to effect an even more primitive function of the imagination, that is, to embody the projective function of the mind to project an inner state outward and

for the moment act "as if" it indeed were outside us. It is not that we believe that it is outside, but rather that we suspend our disbelief in its external reality by an act of willingness so that we might fully experience it. Many artists and aestheticians have noted this requirement for the perceiver of the art work. Norman Holland in The Dynamics of Literary Response has devoted a chapter to the issue--developing Freud's theory that the artist "dreams a dream for us." He cites many artists and critics who use the language of sexuality to describe the aesthetic response. Gaston Bachelard, for example, talks about the poem's "possessing" us completely; Tyrone Guthrie says that a good director does not so much try to create the illusion of reality as he tries to interest the audience so intensely that they are "rapt" (or seized up) and "taken out of themselves"; and aesthetician Bernard Berenson says that the aesthetic experience is a brief, timeless moment when the spectator is "at one" with the work, and "the two become one entity."

Now, how does this model of the imagination "fit" with Masters and Johnson's behavioristic model of sexual functioning? A translation from behavior to imagination, from the natural to the "super" natural, can be accomplished by noting that although Masters and Johnson insist throughout their work that the sexual process is a "natural" functioning, they also note that unlike other natural processes such as breathing and excreting, sexual responsivity can be delayed indefinitely or functionally denied for a lifetime; thus sex can be removed from its natural context as simply a basic physiological response. The fact that it can be thus removed is of course the cause of sexual dysfunction, but it is also that which makes human sexuality different from the sexuality of lower animals; it is what makes sex an act not only of the body but of the imagination, and it is therefore what makes sex pleasurable for human beings and symbolic of many human desires. It is what sex symbolizes, that is, what sex is good for for human beings, that creates the difficulty.

Perceiving sex as "work" instead of "play," for example, or at least symbolic of work instead of play, the adult often sees sexuality as a performance rather than a pleasure. And the problem, of course, is that the very word "performance" is taken not to mean fantasy role-playing as in play, but rather accomplishment as in work. Masters and Johnson say that sexually dysfunctive people, through fears of a poor performance, do not become mentally or emotionally involved in sex and thus take a spectator's role, watching for an erection or an orgasm. By so doing they take sex out of its proper context as a natural physical function. Because sex is an act of the imagination as well as the body, however, we can translate Masters and Johnson's terms to show that the issue is more complex than this--that the problem is one of not being willing or able to suspend disbelief and for the time totally involve oneself imaginatively in the act. It is the failure to leave the adult world of reality and restraint and actively engage in the child's world of pleasure and play. To ease this performance fear, Masters and Johnson developed the most important phase of their therapy program, the phase of sensate focus, a period in which sexuality is engaged in with all pressures for erection or orgasm forbidden by the therapists, a period in which the participants are told to engage in what Freud has called polymorphous perverse play.

That people have to learn to play and to passively receive pleasuring from another is a result of the negative value placed on such behavior in the everyday world outside the bedroom, a world in which work and aggressiveness rather than play and passivity are the primary values. This block against sensate pleasure as being at best indolence and at worst sin, can be paralleled by a similar block in our society against fantasy and daydreams, for our society places positive value on rational and purposeful thinking, not "idle fantasy." Thus, dysfunction in sexuality is a result of the failure to distinguish between the realm of the everyday where active doing may be prized and the realm of sexuality where passive receiving is the prime value.

This bimodal view of experience has been noted by many different thinkers and researchers, and the relationship it suggests between aesthetic response and sexual response can be easily seen. For example, psychiatrist Arthur Deikman has noted the difference between what he calls the "action mode," which is a state of striving toward achieving personal goals; and the "receptive mode," which is organized around intake of the environment instead of its manipulation. Because the action mode has been developed for insuring survival, we have been led to assume that it is the only proper adult mode and to think of the receptive mode as being pathological, regressive, or childish. The characteristics of the receptive mode which are of primary interest to us are: "decreased boundary perceptions," "paralogical thought process" and the dominance of the sensual over the formal. Such characteristics lead Deikman to suggest that love is experienced in the receptive mode, indeed requires the receptive mode to occur, and that in ordinary life the receptive mode plays its most important role in sexual intercourse. Deikman says, "Psychotherapeautic investigations show that an individual's capacity for a satisfying sexual experience is in proportion to his or her capacity to relinquish control, to allow the other person to enter in." In a related essay Deikman talks about this bimodality as the difference between automatization (which creates our categorized and organized world of everyday) and deautomatization (which marks a shift toward reinvesting actions with attention).

These terms remind us of Wordsworth and Coleridge's purposes in The Lyrical Ballads. For Deikman says what happens to the notion of reality during these periods of deautomatization when one has suspended disbelief is that "stimuli of the inner world become invested with the feeling of reality ordinarily bestowed on objects. Through what might be termed 'reality transfer' thoughts and images become real." This projection, or reality transfer, might also be called hallucination or the other side of introjection. They form the two basic ways

of the imagination and thus recall the parallel that John Barth establishes between reader and text that William H. Gass develops further as being like sexual intercourse between human beings. In a sexual relationship there is always the expressive one and the receptive one, and the relationship alternates from one partner to the other. At any one time, one partner must be free and expressive and the other must focus on that partner. The interchange itself is a sensate focussing.

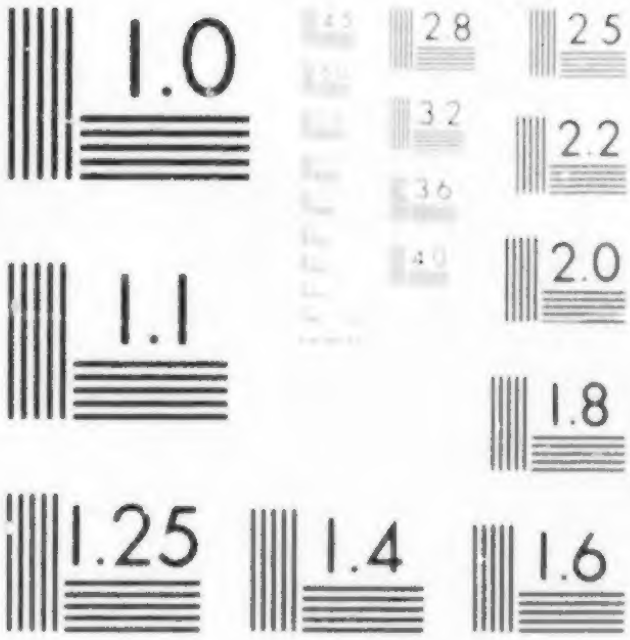
Accepting the nature of this exchange in the sexual experience and the aesthetic experience, we can spring our ideas a bit wider to include another experience which is parallel and combines both the sexual and the aesthetic--an experience termed variously the mystic, the religious, or the meditative experience. In their chapter on the domain of meditation in The Psychology of Meditation, Claudio Naranjo and Robert Ornstein note "The Way of Forms" and "The Expressive Way" as the two baseline forms of meditation. In the first, one attempts to take in an externally given form; in the latter, one tries to attune self to a formless inner depth out of which form emerges. The first is sacerdotal in which one becomes absorbed and unified with the object outside; the second is orgiastic in which one surrenders self completely. In the terms which Nietzsche has made so applicable to the dynamics of the art work, the former is Apollonian, the latter Dionysian. Naranjo and Ornstein note that although these two forms may seem quite different, they actually converge; for the forms and symbols that have been created as the starting points for meditation have originated in spontaneity. "A surrender to spontaneity leads not to chaos but to the expression of a definite structure that all men share." Thus, what is suggested is that for creativity to be possible in love, sex, meditation and literature, there must also be receptivity. The experience is a dialogistic one in which--as Poe once said--the reader must attend to the work of the artist with a "kindred art."

Before going on to more discussion of theories of creativity and receptivity and their implications for love, sex and literature, two additional areas of human experience that take this realm as their own must be considered briefly--the experience of the child and the experience of the primitive--for within this framework ontogeny indeed recapitulates phylogeny. Anthropologists have always been concerned with modes of thinking and experience that characterize the so-called primitive. Mircea Eliade, Claude Lévi-Strauss and many others have investigated primitive or mythical thought. But Ernst Cassirer's philosophical considerations of this realm best fit my purposes here. Cassirer notes a basic distinction between practical or theoretical thinking and mythical thinking. He says that in our habit of dividing life into the two spheres of practical and theoretical activity we are apt to forget that there is a lower substratum that lies beneath both. "Primitive man is not liable to such forgetfulness. All his thoughts and feelings are still embedded in this lower original stratum. His view of nature is neither merely theoretical nor merely practical; it is sympathetic.... Primitive man by no means lacks the ability to grasp the empirical differences of things. But in his conception of nature and life all these differences are obliterated by a stronger feeling: the deep conviction of a fundamental solidarity of life that bridges over the multiplicity and variety of single forms."

When one is under the spell of mythic thinking, says Cassirer, "it is as though the whole world were simply annihilated: the immediate content, whatever it be, that commands his religious interest so completely fills his consciousness that nothing else can exist apart from it." This, in the history of the race, is the paradigm of the suspension of disbelief and sensate focus. It takes as its prerequisite, continues Cassirer, the "focussing of all forces on a single point." In applying this theory to literature, Philip Wheelwright has rightly

noted that such experience is "most incontestably evident" in one's relationship "at certain heightened moments" with another person. "To know someone as a presence instead of as a lump of matter or a set of processes, is to meet him with an open, listening, responsive attitude; it is to become a thou in the presence of his I-hood." It is, of course, this sense of "presence" that Wheelwright says poetic language hopes to capture.

Many child psychologists have noted this sense of oneness in children, but the description most cogent for my purpose here is that of Jean Piaget, who describes the child's magical-phenomenalist world, at least in the first two years of life, in much the same way that Cassirer describes the world of the primitive. "The universe of the young baby," says Piaget, "is a world without objects, consisting only of shifting and unsubstantial tableaux which appear and are then totally reabsorbed." In the first eighteen months, however, "there occurs a kind of Copernican revolution, or more simply, a kind of general decentering process whereby the child eventually comes to regard himself as an object among others in a universe that is made up of permanent objects." Before this point, the child has no consciousness of a boundary between the internal and the external world. What Freud called "primary narcissism" dominates. It is a lack of differentiation between the self and the other, a symbiosis complete, not only as a belief or conviction, but as the only reality. With the loss of this symbiotic reality and the resultant necessity to adapt himself to the world of objects and separation, the child develops a symbolic reality of play to assimilate reality to the self, to conquer it. Freud gives the classic example in Beyond the Pleasure Principle in his description of a child's game of Fort-Da. Piaget has observed many additional examples in his nursery-laboratory. This assimilation of reality is accomplished by the child's creation of symbols to express everything in his experience that cannot be formulated or assimilated by means of conceptual language, for example, the sense of "presence" which



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Wheelwright talks about or the sense of "absence" that prompts the child's game in Freud's example.

There are vague boundaries only, says Piaget, between the conscious and unconscious in children's symbolic play; such play operates like the symbols of the dream in dealing with the child's unconscious conflicts. In short, with the loss of the symbiotic reality--best manifested in the child's relationship to the mother--the child develops a symbolic reality both to assimilate with and alternate with the everyday world of adaptation. And because this symbolic function is located within the pleasure principle of play and the polymorphous perverse, it is thus closely related to the pleasure principle of sexuality.

Although Freud suggested such a connection between sexuality and creativity/receptivity in the early part of the twentieth century, it has only been the last few years that certain radical Freudians such as Norman O. Brown, Herbert Marcuse, R. D. Laing and others have emphasized it so influentially. These thinkers make use of Freud's theories of sexuality, dream and wit to suggest, although sometimes indirectly, the relationship between love and sexuality and the creative/receptive process. The artist, says Freud in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, seeks to recover childhood, return to the pleasure principle and look at his fantasies as if they were real. It is in this way, as Norman Holland suggests, that literature dreams a dream for us, embodies and evokes in us a central fantasy that we do not reality-test because we fuse with the work and in absorbing it become absorbed.

Ideally, the aesthetic stance, like the sexual dynamic, inhibits motor activity and compels an intense focussing. As Poe says, during the time one is reading, the reader is at the writer's control. And this requires a "willing suspension of disbelief," an imaginative or sensate focussing for the dynamic to be effected. Studies of female sexual functioning as reported by Seymour Fisher in The Female Orgasm further justify this requirement for sexuality.

"The process of becoming sufficiently excited to reach orgasm," concludes Fisher at the end of his extensive study, "probably requires a woman to diminish her awareness of other objects.... Attaining orgasm means, at least for a short period, giving up some measure of one's attachment to objects 'out there.'" Similar conclusions can also be applied to men once we accept the obvious fact that ejaculation does not necessarily mean male orgasm. This giving up of one's hold on external reality, this giving up of boundaries to merge with the other or the art work through fantasy, is, as Norman O. Brown says, a giving up for the moment of the reality principle itself.

It is Brown's interpretation of Freud that John Barth's genie has in mind in his analogy of sexuality and literature, for Brown says language itself has its base in infantile erotic play--that all art is actualized play, and that behind every form of play lies a process of the discharge of masturbatory fantasies. "Original sense is nonsense," says Brown, "and common sense a cover-up job." If this is so, to try to dismiss Brown as nonsense is a futile gesture bound to boomerang. And of course Herbert Marcuse, who says that fantasy plays an equal role in what we call perverse sexuality and artistic imagination, must also be charged with nonsense. And R. D. Laing must be similarly charged, for he too notes the disastrous results of splitting off fantasy (our first way of experiencing the world) from what we regard as our mature, sane, rational, adult experience.

Many other thinkers have also indicated the similarities between love and sex and the creative-receptive dynamic of art. Georges Bataille says that eroticism destroys the "self-contained" (Coleridge uses the phrase "selfish solicitude") character of the participants as they are in their normal lives. Jerome Bruner notes that one of the primary conditions of creativity is to be "dominated" by your creation and thus to be "free" of defenses that hide us from ourselves. We can see that the reader must be

similarly dominated to be similarly free. W. H. Auden says the "poet marries the language and out of this marriage the poem is born." The reader must similarly unite with Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife to receive/create her. Rollo May notes that creativity is always an intense encounter which involves being absorbed, caught up, for which sexual intercourse is an appropriate metaphor. Jose Ortega y Gasset says that for the lover, the mystic, the artist, attention is so focussed on the object that for the moment attention is withdrawn from everything else and the sense of union is created. Denis de Rougemont notes that love is both the best conductor and the best stimulant of expression. And finally, Colin Wilson, in his book The Strength to Dream, takes de Rougemont's notion a step further. "The power of the sexual impulse," says Wilson, "can be utilized like the cordite in a bullet, to drive the projectile of the imagination toward new insights." He suggests that the relation between sex and the imagination is so closely interwoven that the sex life of human beings depends almost entirely on imagination. "An irrational flow of vital energy stimulates the imagination; this flow might be described as the 'sexual shock,' and it has much in common with the 'shock of recognition' that Edmund Wilson has described as being the response to authentic artistic power." The strength of the imagination is automatically magnified by the sexual impulse, contends Wilson. This is the reason that so many works of literature depend upon sexual development to hold the reader's attention.

Now we can move from these implications of John Barth's Chimera and William H. Gass's Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife to a consideration of the way Monkey "understands" "Leda and the Swan" in Portnoy's Complaint. The problem here is that if a work of literature makes us respond to it with physical sexual arousal, we define the work as performing a pornographic function. And indeed the whole idea I have been developing about the relationship between literature and sexuality inevitably leads us to that sticky encounter. Perhaps a good way

to begin this ending to my considerations is to quote the foremost expert on porno-graphos (that is the writings of whores), that paradigm of all subsequent pornographic prostitutes, Fanny Hill; for she too notes the innate relationship between love and sex and literature. She says that love and sex is "properly the province of poetry, nay is poetry itself, pregnant with every flower of imagination and loving metaphor."

Philosophers and psychologists both for and against pornography have borne this out. Psychiatrist Abraham Kaplan says obscenity is the very stuff of the imagination, for both obscenity and the imagination stem from the "infantile capacity to endow a mere sign with the affect that belongs properly to what it signifies." That is, both manifest the infantile/artistic, mystic/primitive ability to hallucinate the absent thing as if it were present. Philosopher R. Meager notes that the only thing that distinguishes the dynamics of how sublime writing affects us and how obscene writing affects us is the attitude of the sexually orthodox. Sublime writing "transports us into that state of mind in which the words we read convey a total experience. It demands a suppression of critical detachment." So also, says Meager, does obscene writing, for it evokes a liberation of thought and judgment from the limits of propriety in the gratification of fantasy urges.

It is of course this supression of the critical faculty and the freedom from propriety that make other thinkers condemn pornography as being incompatible with art. Ernest van den Haag, one of the most vocal opponents of porn, says that pornography invites us to regress to a pre-moral world--to return to and spin out pre-adolescent fantasies that reject reality, restraint, conflict. Margaret Mead, George P. Elliott and George Steiner have said much the same. Elliott contends that pornography offends against the sense of separateness. Aesthetic response requires distance. Even the breast of a healthy woman is disgusting, says Elliott, if looked at too closely. Perhaps so, but a more

important issue might be: do we want separation and distance in art? How much repression, how much deception in art can we tolerate, and still remain tolerant in human situations when distance from others cannot be maintained or when we must face ourselves up close?

Monkey's fantasy response to Yeats' poem is indeed a pornographic response. She responds with her body, completely, not just with her critical faculties, partially. But before we are too quick to condemn such responses as antithetical to the aesthetic response, perhaps we should not forget that the word "aesthetic" itself meant the ability to feel sensation before such latter-day Platonists as George Santayna declared that beauty in art evoked a high breathlessness that cancelled out sensation. As Valery says, the "art of the superior artist is to restore... the integrity of sensuality and the emotional power of things." And A.E. Houseman reminds us, as does Emily Dickinson, that poetry is always more physical than intellectual and thus affects us physically.

I am not suggesting here that one should use pornography to teach literature generally. However, I am suggesting that educators do a disservice to education by devaluing daydreams and fantasies of their students, especially sexual fantasies, replacing them with analytical thought and social conventions. And I am suggesting that educators can do education a service, especially education in the humanities, by encouraging and elaborating student fantasies. A likely place to begin is with sexual fantasies. I have found that by making use of student fantasies and by working on the assumption that there is a close relationship between the dynamics of sexual fantasy response and the dynamics of literary response I can better "teach" students to read literature of any kind--to suspend their disbelief, to focus their attention, to take in the literary work and be taken in by it. I like to think that in this way I am encouraging them to learn by inventing.